



## Promoting Healthy Youth Behaviors to Reduce Teen Pregnancy: A Community Partnership Approach

### Public Health Problem

In 2000, Oklahoma had a teen birth rate well above the United States average, ranking 13<sup>th</sup> in the birth rate among young women aged 15 to 19 years. Some Oklahoma City neighborhoods experience a teen birth rate *three to four times* the national average.

### Evidence That Prevention Works

Research suggests that linking teen pregnancy prevention programs with youth development efforts shows promise in addressing the antecedents of teen pregnancy and reducing adolescent risk-taking behaviors.

### Program Example

Funded by CDC and coordinated by the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, the *HEART of OKC* (Healthy, Empowered And Responsible Teens of OKC) was one of 13 teen pregnancy prevention projects that were part of a community capacity-building initiative. From the outset, the *HEART of OKC* focused on changing adult views of youth from negative, deficit-based perspectives to strength-based perspectives that promoted increasing specific protective factors—*youth assets*—while also reducing health risk behaviors that lead to the onset of early sexual activity. From the beginning, community partners agreed that the purpose of the project was to change the perspective of community leaders and other adults so that they recognized young people as potential to be nurtured, not problems to be fixed. The *HEART of OKC* emphasized a blending of science-based principles, promising approaches, and best practices. The project interventions engaged diverse groups of young people in leadership and service-learning opportunities with a range of community partners from Home Depot to the Junior League to central city congregations. As a result, new partnerships, promising new program models, and a new attitude of working “with and through youth,” not doing things “to and for youth,” has emerged. In addition, the project coordinators developed a youth survey and conducted 1,300 pairs of interviews with teens and adults.

### Implications

Organizations that have not traditionally worked together are collaborating to help each other develop resources, implement joint programs, and effectively refer youth and parents to appropriate programs and services. This project demonstrates the importance of a collaborative approach and demonstrates the need for community-driven projects.